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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 000041

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/IPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/06/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: JORDAN'S PM TELLS PARLIAMENT GOJ MAY "RECONSIDER  
RELATIONS" WITH ISRAEL

REF: A. 08 AMMAN 3389 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. 08 AMMAN 2414

[1](#)C. 08 AMMAN 2292

[1](#)D. 08 AMMAN 3164

[1](#)E. 08 AMMAN 2424

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Speaking before Parliament on January 4, Prime Minister Nader Al-Dahabi sharply criticized Israel's escalation of hostilities in Gaza, outlined Jordan's response so far, and capped off his remarks by laying down a marker that Jordan reserved the right to take whatever measures deemed necessary, including reconsidering its relations with Israel. The Prime Minister's address came on the same day as King Abdullah separately expressed anger to a group of government and parliamentary leaders over the "Israeli-led aggression." Our contacts doubted the Kingdom was gearing up to break ties with Israel but pointed to the mounting public pressure on the minds of the country's leaders. A year of friction between Israel and Jordan over a variety of political issues may raise the potential for Jordan to take some limited steps impacting its relations with Israel. End Summary.

Dahabi's Address: Key Points

[1](#)2. (U) PM Dahabi said Jordan was working hard to stop "the treacherous Israeli aggression." He highlighted Jordanian efforts before Israel's ground invasion and described how Jordan's focus continues on two tracks: intensive diplomacy to push for an immediate halt to the "aggression;" and humanitarian efforts to ease Palestinian suffering by providing medical and food aid and working to set up a field military hospital on Palestinian territory. Dahabi asserted that Jordan would continue along this path and would not remain silent. Finally, the PM said that "the government reserves all available options for any measure to assess and reconsider relations with any side, particularly Israel, out of our concern about serving the homeland's higher interests."

[1](#)3. (U) PM Dahabi's speech was widely covered in the local media, which billed his remarks on relations with Israel as a response to calls by some MPs to recall Jordan's Ambassador to Israel and expel the Israeli Ambassador in Amman. The Independent daily Al-Ghad's headline read "Jordan Hints At Severing Relations with Israel." The paper also noted that Jordan's Ambassador to Israel had yet to return to Tel Aviv after taking part in an annual Jordanian Ambassadorial-level conference at the end of December in Amman.

[1](#)4. (U) The Prime Minister's address came on the same day that King Abdullah separately publicly expressed his anger to a group of government and parliamentary leaders over the "Israeli-led aggression" and asserted that "diverse capabilities are at (our) disposal to alleviate repercussions

and outcomes of Tel Aviv's offensive acts."

#### GOJ Bends But Does Not (Yet) Bow to Public Pressure

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15. (C) While the media has characterized Dahabi's statement as capitulation to public outrage, some of our contacts suggested that Dahabi's comment was an acknowledgement of public sentiment. In January 5 conversations, contacts downplayed the likelihood of any change in the Jordan-Israel relationship, while speculating that if the conflict drags on and public anger continues along its present trajectory, Jordan might indeed take some kind of action impacting its relations with Israel.

16. (C) On the margins of a January 5 meeting between Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Jordan Armed Forces General Khaled Sarayreh and DAO, Sarayreh responded to a query by PolMilOff by saying that on such occasions the "masses get very enthusiastic" and "governments need to speak to those concerns before they turn into a national security issue." There had been no change in his standing orders toward Israel, said Sarayreh, who added that Israel's actions are damaging its moderate allies and they should "listen to their friends." On the margins of the same meeting, Brigadier General Mohammad Farghal, Chief of Strategic Planning, noted the large Palestinian population in Jordan and specifically cited Gaza-origin Palestinians in a refugee camp outside Jerash. "We have sensitive demographics, and of course people are going to empathize with Gaza," he said.

17. (C) Deputy Director of the Foreign Ministry's

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International Organizations Bureau Khaled Takhayneh apportioned blame on Israel and Hamas for the current crisis but explained that unlike Egypt - which did not have Jordan's large Palestinian population - the GOJ could not afford to be more evenhanded in its public response. Takhayneh said the GOJ cannot publicly criticize Hamas because it would seem to the public as if it were giving Israel the okay to attack. The Prime Minister's comments should be viewed through that lens, he explained, noting that the level of discontent on the street was becoming more dangerous to Jordanian stability. "The police and other departments are getting practically no sleep," he said, to emphasize the point. While they have been instructed to allow the demonstrations and to avoid the use of force, they themselves are being stoned and attacked.

18. (C) Takhayneh doubted Jordan was preparing to sever ties with Israel - and thought it would be a bad idea - but speculated that if the domestic situation worsened, the government might do so. He highlighted the Prime Minister's words that Jordan would act in its national interest. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had placed himself at risk of assassination or ouster, "maybe even from one of his own men," because of his comments blaming Hamas, according to Takhayneh, who implied that the King would never let public discontent get so far as to threaten his rule. Asked what might immediately help alleviate pressure on the King, Takhayneh said short of ending its military operations, Israel should allow Jordan to set up a field military hospital in Gaza.

19. (C) Muhammad Al-Momani, who hosts a current affairs program on Jordan's state-run television speculated to PolOff that the Jordanian elite understood that "what Israel is doing is indeed self-defense" in response to Hamas provocations, even if it was excessive on a humanitarian level. While the government had acted correctly in letting the public vent through peaceful demonstrations, Jordan was losing an opportunity to educate the public about Hamas's negative role, and - in reference to Dahabi's comments - needlessly getting itself in trouble with Israel. During past crises, the government had rejected withdrawing its

Ambassador from Israel and expelling the Israeli Ambassador in Amman, arguing publicly that such action would only harm long-term Palestinian interests, but this time, no such statements were forthcoming. "Telling people what they like to hear is immature politically," Momani assessed. He concluded that such pandering is generally unnecessary unless Jordan were facing a genuine threat to its internal stability, which is not the case now given the level of public protest and parliamentary anger. (Note: Momani described how when hostilities broke out initially he had been interviewed by Jordan television and had said that Hamas's behavior seemed to lack direction. Soon after his comments were aired, Information Minister Nasser Joudeh called him and urged that now was not the right time to criticize Hamas. End Note.)

¶10. (C) Comment: The outrage expressed by the King and PM Dahabi should not be viewed in isolation from all the political friction over the past year with Israel, nor should their cumulative effect be underestimated. Indeed, Momani himself cited factors - "bad blood," he called it - that we have reported on extensively: The ongoing dispute over plans to rebuild an ascent to the Mughrabi Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem (Ref A); Jordanian embarrassment over Israel's release of terrorist Samir Quntar to Hizballah last summer at a time when Jordan continued to incarcerate Jordanians transferred from Israel after serving part of their sentences for terror convictions (Refs B and C); and that Israel had engaged in indirect talks with Hamas over the cease-fire even as Jordan at the time continued to boycott the Hamas leadership (Refs D and E). On all three issues Jordan has, in effect, responded in ways that have or could negatively affect relations with Israel. On Mughrabi Gate the GOJ has repeatedly threatened to use all legal and political means to block Israeli unilateralism. In response to Quntar's release, Jordan decided to free the prisoners it was holding on Israel's behalf several months earlier than had been agreed. And soon after the Hamas-Israel cease-fire went into effect, Jordan announced it had resumed a dialogue with the Hamas political leadership. That being said, while Jordan and Israel are at odds on political issues, economic cooperation continues with strong coordination on a proposal seeking USG approval of new satellite Qualifying Industrial Zone garment factories, with no hint from the involved parties of strained bilateral relations.

¶11. (C) Comment continued: Our contacts offered their political observations - which were more measured than the

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media's reception of Dahabi's comments - very shortly after the PM's remarks to Parliament. GOJ decision-making on addressing its relations with Israel remains in flux and there are a variety of intermediate steps that could be taken before an extreme measure like "severing" ties. For one, Jordan's Ambassador to Israel, who is still in Amman following a diplomatic conference, could simply remain here. End Comment.

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